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ABSTRACT

Teaching strategies and materials that support literacy development among young children are considered. Discussions concern: (1) emergent literacy; (2) creation of a literate classroom environment; (3) literature as a springboard into writing; (4) the process of building a community of writers; (5) inventive spelling; and (6) the process of bridging the gap between reading and writing. It is concluded that when students are engaged in purposeful and relevant literacy activities, they can draw from personal experiences to express feelings, share ideas, and explore interests. When teachers foster a strong sense of ownership in the learning process, students develop lifelong literacy skills that will help them to meet challenges in the school, the home, and the community. A total of 45 references are cited. (RH)

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Velveteen Rabbit "Gaets Scke"

Belle L. Akers

The Velveteen Rabbit, by Margery Williams, inspired a creative dramatic play episode one afternoon. A group of kindergartners decided our soft, fuzzy Velveteen rabbit was sick. From the doll house area, they borrowed a doll size bed, fluffy pillow and warm, red-gingham checked blanket. One child thought Velveteen rabbit had a temperature. Another child scurried off to make a thermometer and medicine.

Velveteen rabbit was put lovingly to bed, much like Peter, in The Tale of Peter Rabbit, and given a dose of medicine. Although Peter's medicine was camomile tea, Velveteen rabbit's medicine included wonderful messages delivered in a sealed, 4 1/2" x 12", bulging red construction paper envelope. Verbal instructions were given for the envelope to be opened later. "This is for Velveteen bunny. You can open it after school. Don't look now."

After dismissal, I returned to the classroom to find Velveteen rabbit still snuggly nestled in his sick-bed. The red envelope was adjacent to the bed. Upon opening it, I was struck with amazement at what I found inside. In this care package, Velveteen rabbit received not only thoughtfully written get well cards but also two red construction paper tee-shirts, a cut-out rabbit, a folded hat and a magazine to read. Messages included:

Gaet Wale Son	I hop
To: Benne	you gaet
from	betur
Charlene	Love Jennifer

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Emergent Literacy

What are the implications from this creative play episode? What classroom practices will support literacy development? The Velveteen rabbit episode (Akers, 1990) is an excellent example of a holistic language activity. An early literacy curriculum which integrates all aspects of language development, speaking, listening, reading and writing, engages students as active participants in the learning process. The students demonstrated an emergent level of literacy, particularly in the function of print. As they engaged in purposeful play, reading and writing occurred as a natural process. They showed confidence in themselves as a part of the reading and writing community.

While the teacher may have read *The Velveteen Rabbit* to the class, the story did not end there. By having a stuffed Velveteen rabbit available for play, students were able to extend beyond just listening to a story. The kindergartners who engaged in the Velveteen rabbit play displayed a sense of ownership in the learning process. The kindergartners created a plot, working out the details through conversation. As the plot developed, so did a need for legitimate items such as a thermometer, medicine, get well cards, and clothing. Art materials and writing supplies from different areas of the classroom were collected and used in making props. They independently made

get well cards, following standard form, with a drawing on the cover and a written message on the inside. The kindergartners wrote their own messages using invented spellings.

Through classroom observations of kindergartners and first graders immersed in a literate environment, I have gained valuable insight into the world of emergent readers and writers. In the classroom, teachers can provide literacy activities which engage students in the learning process and allow them to share their knowledge. By implementing literacy curriculum as a whole unit rather than isolated skill areas, learning can be made more meaningful for students. Teachers must strike a balance between directed instruction and student-initiated activities. Students must be given opportunities to experiment, apply and extend what they have learned about reading and writing in creative projects outside of structured basal programs. Velveteen rabbit is only one example of how students interact with classroom materials in a literate environment.

What are some teaching strategies and materials which supports literacy development? Dyson (1984) recommends treating all children as readers and writers. She states "as we teachers observe the fine details of young children engaging in the whole process of reading and writing, as we respond with encouragement and support, we will find the potential for literacy growth in

all" (p. 271). Teachers can structure time and provide resources in the classroom to encourage active participation of students in the learning process. Students have an important role in contributing to a literate environment by giving dictation (Dyson, 1988; Hall, 1986), making signs for creative building projects, illustrating pages for class books, and writing in journals (Goodman, 1989; Kintish, 1986; Hipple, 1985) or learning logs (Bode, 1989; Gambrell,1985).

Creating A Literate Classroom Environment

A print-rich classroom where language experience stories, class books, charts, graphs, artwork and student projects are displayed create a literate environment (Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Schwartz, 1988; Taylor & Gay,1988; Schickedanz, 1986; Milz, 1982). Interest centers (Morrow, 1989; Nachbar, 1989; Loughlin & Martin, 1987; Allen & Allen, 1982) are an integral part of the floor plan to facilitate ongoing learning experiences in many areas of the classroom. Students have access to raw materials with which to create with in the art, language, and writing centers.

A writing center provides students with access to supplies, such as paper, construction paper, pencils, colored pencils, marker pens, felt-tip pens, crayons, tape, paper fastners, staplers, index cards and self-adhesive labels. As the need arises for communication, students show confidence in sharing

feelings and ideas on paper whether it is for a birthday card, an "I love you" message for mom and dad, a message to a classmate or a creative story.

Another important feature in a literate classroom is having an area for books. Literature invites students into the world of reading (Rasala, 1989; Laurin, 1988; Cullinan,1987). Students need exposure to a wide variety of reading materials, including books, magazines, listening tapes, newspapers, posters, signs and class published books. Students need many opportunities to read aloud, read silently and read together.

Literature As A Springboard into Writing

Literature provides a natural bridge between reading and writing. By listening to how words are used in literature, students become exposed to language patterns. Students can join in repeating predictable lines (Walton, 1989; Heald-Taylor, 1987)) or chanting rhymes as stories are read aloud. Conventions of the English language are reinforced through the enjoyable format of children's literature. While students reread books on their own, they are informally learning about sentence structure, syntax, and punctuation as a function of writing.

Literature has been successfully used to generate themes for publishing class books. The repetition of familiar lines or rhymes found in books provide a natural lead in for class books. In <u>There's an Alligator Under My Bed</u>, by

Mercer Mayer, a young boy is afraid of an alligator which is hiding under his bed. The topic for a class book can be, "There's a _____ under my bed." Students illustrate their hiding place and dictate words to complete the sentence. After students illustrate and give dictation, all the pages are bound together into a book. Class books can be bound using shoelaces, binder rings, or plastic binding. Class books are added to the book area and become part of the classroom library collection. Students enjoy seeing, hearing and reading their words over and over again!

Students develop an appreciation and interest in literature through exposure to a wide selection of literary genre. Classroom libraries should also include multicultural literary selections which expose students to the diverse cultures and traditions beyond their own experiences. The influence of literature appears in dictation and creative writing. A kindergartner begins her story, "It was a calm, quiet sea." Another kindergartner explores illustrating and writing a group of fish stories over a period of one month. Titles included: "tha Littl weal" ("The Little Whale"); "The littol weat waele" ("The Little White Whale"); and "the lttel CAt faeh" ("The Little Cat Fish"). Literature opens the door to imagination and writing allows students to explore new interests.

On occasion, story plots or characters are borrowed from literature and appear in student composed stories. A winter story, The Snow Child, by Freya

Littledale, obviously influenced a first grader's creative writing. In Littledale's book, a snow child appears and lives with an old man and his wife during the winter months. Emily's story is titled, "The Sun Shiuld" [sic]. Reprinted in its original form, this story contains the inventive spellings of words written by Emily . It begins in chapter one:

> Ones upun a time ther wus a women. She wutid a child. One day in sumur a shild cam fram the sun. One day the sun chiuld went in to the woods. Sh saw 3 bears. thea wur having a pinik.

In Littledale's story, when spring arrives the snow child leaves her home. At the conclusion of the story, the snow child reappears at the home of the old man and his wife. In Emily's story, chapter 2 concludes:

> im going back to the sun tomorrow.
>
> ho no (written next to a drawing of the woman)
>
> Il be back nekxt summer. "bey" sid the sun siuld.

Authorship: Building a Community of Writers

Students learn about writing through writing. During the process of writing, students are learning to get their ideas down on paper. Research by leading educators, such as, Kenneth Goodman (1989,1986), Jerome Hartse (1988, 1984), Jane Hansen (1987), Lucy Calkins (1986) and Donald Graves (1983) identify the need for students in the primary grades to engage in

writing. Calkins indicates the important role that writing has in literacy development. She believes children who get interested in writing get interested in reading. A writing workshop invites young children into the world of writing; thus, writing becomes a natural means of expression.

The atmosphere of a writer's workshop allows students to develop fluency in writing and expressing their ideas. Primary students are given a regular, uninterrupted time to write. Calkins cautions that the emphasis of a writing workshop is not on perfect English but getting your ideas on paper. For the first draft, by removing the constraints of writing to produce a finished product based on a specific topic, perfect penmanship and correct spellings, students can write freely and use the knowledge they have about language and writing. Editing techniques are later introduced to help guide students in checking their writing for mechanics such as capitalization, punctuation and spelling.

Students, beginning in kindergarten are encouraged to write as best they can. During kindergarten, a writer's workshop evolves more around students illustrations and dictation given to the teacher. Kindergartners become aware of the connection between spoken language and the written word as they watch the teacher print their words. They begin to feel a real sense of authorship for their own work. Stories are kept in a writing folder at school. These stories

are read aloud, shared with classmates and cross grade reading partners.

In a writing classroom, there are many resources for students to draw upon for their ideas. Therefore, the task of writing on a blank piece of paper is not intimidating. Students can use the teacher, classmates, literature, and classroom materials to launch into writing. Students learn about writing from each other. Young writers love to read and share their completed stories from an author's chair. From shared reading time, incidental learning takes place as students listen to each other's words. At the next writer's workshop, a character or story plot may be borrowed to use in a new story.

First graders offer these insights as what helps them to get started in writing:

> Alison: I look around the classroom and the things that we have. I can't find anything, then I think about someplace I've been to or something I've done.
>
> Harper: I look around the classroom for pictures and see if I want to use them for my characters.
>
> Eileen: I think in my head of the stories I have already written and I take some of those words and I put them in a different story.
>
> Elizabeth: I think about my pictures and then I know what I'm going to do with my story.

Students make the connection between writing and reading through active participation as writers. What happens when you stop writing in the middle of

a piece? One first grader has a perfect solution. Caroline says, "Sometimes, I forget where I am in a story and when I'm stuck, I just go back to the beginning and read it all over again." As students gain self-confidence in writing, they develop a positive attitude about writing.

Inventive Spellings: "I ced rait vare wal"

By making writing an integral part of classroom life, students as young as kindergartners can develop positive attitudes toward writing. A kindergartner writes in her journal, "I ced rait vare wal", (I could write very well). How exciting it must be for the five or six year child who discovers writing as a tool for communication. O'Neil (1989) shares Goodman's (1986) viewpoint on literacy development that students who work in a print-rich environment are learning successfully through risk-taking and error. "Scribbling, reversed letters, invented spellings, creative punctuation, and reading and writing miscues are charming indications of growth toward control of the language process" (p. 6).

Research on inventive spelling, also referred to as developmental spelling, indicates there are identifiable stages of writing development (Strickland & Morrow, 1988; Salinger, 1987; Gentry, 1987, 1982; Hall & Hall, 1984; Heald-Taylor, 1984; Schickedanz & Sullivan, 1984; Bissex, 1980). Inventive spellings follow consistent patterns as emergent writers formulate concepts

about written language. Teale (1988) states:

> When encouraged to write, many kindergartners and some early first graders begin by using prephonemic writing strategies such as drawing, scribbling, letter-like forms, or random or patterned letters. But with writing experience, a literacy-rich classroom and appropriate guidance, children soon become aware of the necessity for using particular letters to encode their words. Early forms of inventive spelling emerge. (p. 20)

Research findings (Goodman, 1989; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989; Franklin, 1988; Brugelmann, 1987) indicate that bilingual or limited English speaking students utilize analogous strategies in literacy and spelling development. Franklin (1988) describes the literacy learning of a group of kindergarten and 1st grade Hispanic bilingual children who were exposed to both literature and writing. Franklin's observations revealed measurable growth as individual students explored with writing. One student, Jose, moved from dictation to invented spellings. Another student, Maria, demonstrated an awareness for punctuation as she overgeneralized the use of the apostrophe and periods in text.

Brugelmann (1987) describes the components of a process approach to beginning reading and writing in West Germany. One component of the educational philosophy states:

> Children should be allowed to experiment actively with print, i.e., to learn from their own reading and writing attempts without being restricted to correct solutions. We should recognize progression along intermediate stages on their routes to literacy, in spite of mistakes and the way still to go. (p. 892)

Brugelmann recognizes the value in students' attempts in writing. As emergent writers piece together the puzzle of print in their writing, they follow consistent patterns, including overgeneralization of concepts and skills. Similiar findings are reported in Dyson's (1982) observations of young children, four to seven years, "who are confronting the written language puzzle" (p. 892).

A developmental range is clearly identifiable as writing forms include precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic and transitional spellings prior to correct spellings (Gentry, 1985). The following examples of inventive spellings appeared in writing journal entries of kindergartners and first graders. The words have been placed in order from precommunicative to transitional, to illustrate developmental levels. As emergent writers gain mastery of sound-symbol relationships, corresponding growth can be seen in spelling attempts.

precommunicative - VRNNZ; NZVNS; NZRNNS (translations not recorded); DNDGD=I'm going to my friend's house; N-TN-ZHT=It is hot;

semiphonetic- HL=hill; bgc=bug; prs=princess; lt=lost; m=me; sm=swim; frz=forest; srp= stripe; lk=like; hv=have; prk=park; wt=went;

phonetic- anmlzs=animals; buc=book; wuz=was; sbad=spend; wet=went; late bag=ladybug; plsas=princess; qwen= queen; ranbo=rainbow;

transitional- sestur=sister; calar=color; lave=live; barhday=birthday; caek=cake; wnet=went; prka=park; soreys=stories; brothre=brother.

Research supports the premise that inventive spellings are an acceptable part of the process in learning about writing and spelling. Students apply knowledge they have about written language as they produce inventive spellings. Salinger's (1987) suggestions for practical guidelines to help children develop spelling competency include: exposing children to print in a literate classroom environment; encouraging active involvement in language activities (word games, language experience stories); engaging children in creative writing and giving positive feedback to children for writing behaviors.

Bridging the Gap Between Reading and Writing

Teachers have an important role in providing literacy curriculum and materials which invite students to become participants in the learning process. As emphasis is placed upon process and not product, students are given many opportunities to engage in purposeful reading and creative writing activities (Kline, 1988; Laurin, 1988) beyond basal reading programs. Strickland & Morrow

(1988) state:

> ...curriculum planning from an emergent literacy perspective emphasizes children's ongoing development of skills in reading and writing, rather than the accumulation of prerequisite subskills. It involves setting conditions that allow children to engage in literacy activities that are meaningful and functional for them. (p.71)

By engaging students in appropriate literacy activities, teachers can foster a positive attitude toward literacy growth as students learn to speak, listen, read and write with meaning, purpose, and pleasure.

Sacred Heart teachers are guiding students toward becoming members of a literate community by providing them with a strong foundation in literacy. Through using an integrated approach in literacy curriculum, teachers can acknowledge the learning potential within individual students. Thus students are supported and challenged at developmental levels through appropriate learning activities. Sacred Heart students bring to school many rich experiences from their homes and cultures. By engaging our students in purposeful and relevant literacy activities, whether they are oral presentations, journal writing, or topic writing, they can draw from personal experiences to express feelings, share ideas, and explore interests. By fostering a strong sense

of ownership in the learning process, our students are developing lifelong literacy skills which will help them to meet the challenges ahead, not only in school, but also outside the classroom, in the home, and in the community.

By the way, velveteen rabbit has recovered and is doing quite well!

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